

**CLARK KENT ERVIN, DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY PROGRAM,
THE ASPEN INSTITUTE - TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE
ON HOMELAND SECURITY'S SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE,
INFORMATION SHARING, AND TERRORISM RISK ASSESSMENT FOR THE
MARCH 17, 2010 HEARING ON "WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES TO
DISRUPT TERROR PLOTS"**

Thank you, Chairwoman Harman, Ranking Member McCaul, and members for inviting me to testify today on the very important and timely topic, "Working with Communities to Disrupt Terror Plots."

The recent spate of aborted terror plots, especially the Christmas Day bombing attempt, all serve to underscore the fact that terrorists remain determined to strike the homeland again, and the odds of preventing them from ever succeeding are low. To kill, injure, and destroy, terrorists have to "get it right" only once, while those in the business of counterterrorism must "get it right" 24/7. My main point today, and I think the point of this whole hearing, is that the business of counterterrorism must be every American's business, not just that of those now privileged to serve in government. Our country is too big; and (commendably) too open and free, with too many tempting targets, for us to think that government officials alone can defend us from this omnipresent, and, perhaps even existential, threat. Average Americans in every community must be the eyes and ears of law enforcement officials and intelligence analysts; we ordinary citizens must be government's force multiplier.

This is certainly true for Muslim-Americans. The overwhelming majority of Muslim-Americans, like all Americans, are loyal and patriotic citizens, more than willing to do their part to protect and defend us all. If anything, they are even more disposed to decry and condemn violent extremists in their own community who would do this country harm than we non-Muslims are precisely because those extremists are in *their* community and they blacken the name of their community and pervert their faith. We must shine the spotlight of national attention and cast the warm glow of approval on the efforts of, for example, law enforcement authorities in New York City and Los Angeles who embrace the racial/ethnic/religious diversity in their communities and use it to their advantage by enlisting such minorities in their counterterrorism efforts. NYPD and LAPD are effective terror fighters in large part because their ranks include men and women who come from these communities and know them best. These police organizations engage in constant dialogue with these communities, hearing their concerns, addressing their complaints, soliciting their advice and counsel, and earning their trust and goodwill. When differences arise, as they inevitably will, the positive relationships that have been established over time serve to keep disagreements in perspective and passions cool. To be commended, too, at the federal level, are like efforts by the National Counterterrorism Center; the Department of Homeland Security; and the Homeland Security Advisory Council.

Such outreach can encourage community members to turn to the authorities when they spot signs of radicalism in their midst and can serve to foil terror plots before they go too

far. We saw an example of that recently when Somali parents in Northern Virginia, concerned about the disappearance of their young sons, confided their fears of terror ties to a Muslim organization, which then confided in the authorities, ultimately resulting in the arrest of the young men in Pakistan before they could carry out acts of terrorism. It is, needless to say, highly unlikely, that the community would have turned to the authorities in this instance had the relationship between the two beforehand been one of mistrust and confrontation rather than trust and cooperation.

Also noteworthy and highly commendable is NYPD's effort – the 2007 report by two of its intelligence analysts, "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat" – to determine why and how people become radicalized to the point of becoming terrorists. There must be continual such efforts in communities across the country to identify and to counteract the factors – lack of economic opportunity, limited education; strained family ties; a sense of impotence, alienation and grievance; a desire to be a part of something big and noble. – which lead naïve and impressionable minds down the path of terrorism. Government, industry, schools, places of worship, and non-profit organizations must work together to provide positive alternatives – jobs and job training, constructive social organizations, athletic programs, and the like – to lives of aimlessness and anomie. An idle mind is truly the devil's workshop.

It is not just Muslims, of course, who should be alert for signs of terrorism in their communities. All of us must be vigilant. First of all, we must underscore the fact that, just as not all Muslims are terrorists, so not all terrorists are Muslims. If by "terrorists" we mean all those who terrorize, then certainly Joseph Stack, who flew a small plane into an IRS building in Austin recently, and John Bedell, who wounded two police officers at Pentagon more recently still, then it should be clear to all now that terrorists come in all races, ethnicities, and genders, and they can have all different kinds of grievances. "Terrorist" is not a "one size fits all" term. And, even those terrorists who at least claim to be Muslims can likewise defy stereotypes, as the even more recent cases of the female, blond-haired, and blue-eyed "Jihad Jane," Coleen La Rue, and Jamie Pauline-Ramirez highlight. Such cases help make the point that terrorist stereotyping is not just *politically* incorrect; it is simply *incorrect*.

If anyone can be a terrorist, everyone can fight terrorism. Whether it's the TSA Behavior Detection Officer specially trained to spot signs of terror intent at airports; the New Jersey electronics store clerk who questions video he is asked to duplicate showing men apparently training for jihad and brings it to the attention of authorities, foiling the Fort Dix plot; the beauty supply store owner noticing the same person repeatedly buying unusually large quantities of hydrogen peroxide; or the mail carrier going about his daily route and noticing that the trees in front of a particular house have suddenly turned white and wonders whether this might be the result of a bomb production lab inside, anyone and everyone – inside government and out – can and must play a role in preventing terror if we are to have any hope of doing so more often than not.

We cannot know for sure from the recent spate of incidents whether terror plots are increasing in number and seriousness, but it is more than reasonable to draw than

inference. Since 9/11, both the Bush and Obama Administrations have done a commendable job of killing and capturing terrorists. But, the next, and even more important step - stopping the terrorist production line at its source – remains very much a work in progress. I am grateful for this opportunity to participate in a hearing that, appropriately, is focused on exactly this.